

# THE WINDOW

## UNITED STATES ARMY MORALE

By MICHAEL EVANS

*One of the hardest tasks of an editor in war time is to keep his readers informed about what is going on in enemy countries. The rupture of normal communications, strict censorship, and intentional falsification of news, make it extremely difficult to learn anything about what is going on in the minds of people on the other side of the front. Yet morale is the most important single factor in war.*

*In connection with our recent article on Lt. Col. Lehrbas we mentioned that circumstances of war had placed in our hands a large number of Australian newspapers and magazines published in 1942. In "Digest of Digests" (February 1942, pp. 24-28) we found an article which we present here because it throws much light on the morale of the American Army. Our readers, we believe, will find what Mr. Michael Evans says not only interesting but also most enlightening as an indication of how superficial and purely materialistic is the attitude towards the outstanding issue of army morale in America.—K.M.*

**T**OMMY is an infantry private at one of those huge Southern encampments which have sprouted from a tangle of slash pine and sand to a community of 50,000 men. It was Sunday morning, and B-Company room—a bare, unpainted hall of rough lumber—was deserted except for Tommy and the bored canteen attendant.

Tommy's eyes stared drearily into space. His head ached, and he was worried that he might have caught some disease from the "waitress" down at the "barbecue shack," a couple of miles outside camp limits.

Tommy had gone to the place with a couple of fellows from the barracks. He was a nice clean kid from the wide-open spaces, and it was the first time he had ever been with a prostitute. He had been excited when they went into the barbecue place. First they sat at the counter and ordered a round of "shots"—small bottles of lemon pop, spiked with alcohol.

After three rounds of shots, Tommy and his friends went out into the back room with the blonde waitress. That part was all a little vague to Tommy this morning but he did remember visiting the prophylactic station back in camp.

Now it was Sunday morning, and Tommy had a hangover that was mental and moral as well as physical. He was homesick and heartsick. If anyone had asked him what

he thought about defending America, he would have said, "the hell with it," and meant it.

There are probably other things wrong with the Army, but the case of Tommy vividly illustrates the running sore in its attempt to keep millions of young men fit, healthy, happy, and enthusiastic. Yet, with the brilliant exceptions of the Air Corps, the Armored Forces and some other picked units—the Army score on morale ranges from bad through indifferent to shameful.

You can chase the responsibility for this breakdown through Congress, which failed to appropriate the money for recreation facilities—through the Army High Command, which didn't insist on the money and bungled the use of what it got—past ineptly trained field officers—right into the small towns and cities which prey on the personnel of the big encampments.

But wherever the blame lies you get right back to the fact that morale in the Army is a condition, not a theory.

Morale isn't just a question of giving Tommy something to do on Saturday night that will keep him out of the barbecue shacks—though that's a big part of it.

It's a case of prompt delivery of mail to soldiers. That seems like a small matter, but it wasn't so small to a young farm lad

from Ohio who was off on manoeuvres in Louisiana last September. His mother was gravely ill when his outfit went into the field, and his captain had promised him leave to rush home if her condition got worse. Ten days before the letter from southern Ohio reached the lad in Louisiana his mother died. His "morale" now makes up part of what is wrong with the Army.

It's a case of common sense in handling men, too. For instance, consider the young interne from Louisville who was drafted into the Army over the protest of the hospital where he was serving. The local draft board apparently saw no reason to give the interne any different treatment than an unskilled laborer. That went for the Army, too, in spite of its declared policy of fitting men to the tasks for which they are best qualified. At last reports the interne was busily engaged in "kitchen police" duty with an infantry unit in Iowa, having been assigned that task because of his efforts to get transferred to the medical corps. You can write your own ticket as to this man's morale.

It's even a case of putting the bill of rights into practice in the case of Negro outfits sent from the North into Southern camps. The enthusiasm of at least one Negro unit from Michigan was hardly improved by being chased off the highways of Arkansas by an organised mob of deputies and vigilantes.

And it's a case of hearing from girls back home to thousands of soldiers. Maybe twenty-one-year-olds shouldn't fret over whose high-school class rings their girls are wearing. But they do.

No, army morale is not a lot of fine, polysyllabic words in newspaper editorials.

It is, instead, how a lot of young fellows away from home feel about things—little things for the most part.

This is a serious business. Just as serious as panzer divisions and dive bombers. A soldier who has just had a letter from the girl back home telling him she is going to marry that buck-toothed dentist, is just one more recruit for that what's-wrong-with-the Army. A little more frankness about the sex life of the millions of healthy American males uprooted from their natural environment would do the US Army no harm. Obviously these young men won't turn celibate overnight just because they have

been jerked out of homes from Keokuk to Kennebec, dressed in uniforms and sent to live in isolated camps.

Everyone, of course, from burlesque strippers to Junior League hostesses, has taken a haphazard crack at doing something for what they like to call "the boys' morale."

Margie Hart mailed her picture to General Haskell—mailed a thousand of them, in fact—"to give the boys a little romance and sentiment in their lonely hours." The General, blinking the fact that every tent in his command boasted a collection of "poster art," promptly mailed them back. Elsa Maxwell toured the camps and proclaimed with essential wisdom that every American boy was entitled to dance with an American girl and to hold her hand on a park bench in the moonlight. This advice had no apparent effect upon the parents of thousands of young Southern women in the towns close to the big camps, who have been forbidden to speak—much less walk in the moonlight—with any soldier under the rank of lieutenant. John Powers ordered fifty of his most luscious girl models up to the firing line with instructions to get in there and give for the red, white and blue. That meant that an astronomical fraction of one per cent of the Army spent an embarrassing day amid the popping flashbulbs of the news cameramen while the Powers girls garnered more free publicity.

It has all been very gay and rather hysterical. Two hundred debutantes for a camp of 60,000 soldiers; Friday-night Church dances for one man per platoon; dinner and an evening with a bashful girl under her parent's watchful eyes for twenty to thirty men out of a camp of 20,000; a day at the beach under the camera lens of a picture magazine for five soldiers.

Give the Army credit, though. It saw this cloud before it was bigger than a man's hand. The intent was excellent. They appealed to the American Social Hygiene Association. They got Dr. Thomas Parran, the great public crusader for common sense and sanity in sex. They created a Morale Section—the first in history, and devised a down-to-earth programme something like this:

Give the boys plenty to do in their off hours—games, good shows, athletics, camp newspapers, dances where they can talk and laugh with girls, sightseeing trips, etc. Keep all this cheap or free, so the boys can

afford it. Make it easy for them to enjoy themselves wholesomely without much effort. Keep the areas around the camps as free as possible of prostitutes, beer joints and riff-raff. On the medical side, give the men frank instruction on sex and how to care for themselves. Provide all possible facilities for prevention, detection, and treatment of infection.

On paper that sounds easy. In practice it has been a galloping headache.

The Army never had a Morale Section before. That in itself meant trouble with precedent-bound brass-hats. To make matters worse, the Morale Command got only advisory powers. It could not step into a camp and say: "This is how we are going to do it."

Then, the Morale Section got only US \$250,000 as an initial appropriation—about 15 cents for each of the 1,500,000 men in training the first year. It had enough money to buy each man a packet of cigarettes!

There hasn't been money for recreational interests at most Army establishments—except for some of the exhibition teams which sports-conscious commandants have built up here and there with drafted talent from the professional leagues. All camps have movie theatres, but none has enough to accommodate all the men at one time or even, for the most part, in split shifts. Even Army movies are Grade B features. Grade A films cost too much.

The worst situation is in the South—site of most of the big camps and manoeuvre areas. The camps are miles away from big cities. They are surrounded by little towns and villages where authorities are frequently hostile and almost invariably indifferent.

To meet this problem the Army has embarked on a radical solution. It is setting up along the Gulf Coast a chain of recreation areas—the khaki equivalent of a week-end resort where soldiers can go for Saturday and Sunday to fish, swim, dance, play golf and ride the big dipper. The recreation camps are the answer, par excellence, to the morale problem. They are cheap, clean and healthy. The youngsters have a good

time. But the average camp accommodates only 500 to 1,000 soldiers. Only a dozen were in operation by autumn. At that rate a soldier would be lucky to get a week-end a year in the fun areas. It will be a year before anything like enough camps are operating.

Since time immemorial every army has had women camp followers, and the US Army today is no exception.

The Army can, and does, send Military Police into red-light areas, to keep an eye on the boys and exercise rather superficial surveillance over the women. But if local authorities permit the operation of commercial vice establishments—and most do—then the Army cannot close them.

At least half the Army's problem arises from the mere physical smallness of the towns around the big camps. They simply do not have the facilities to cope with vice and crime. They have no amusement or entertainment facilities for the 50,000 men set down a half-dozen miles away. This is the field in which the late-starting United Service Organisations should do the most good. Its mission is to establish in such towns places where the soldiers can have fun.

In the field of direct sex control—by contrast—the Army has done a four-star job. The programme is one hundred per cent practical. During their first week in the Army, a hard-boiled sergeant who has been through the mill gives the boys practical pointers on what to avoid.

The men are frankly and repeatedly instructed in venereal-disease dangers and how to protect themselves. Treatment of cases that develop is compulsory and efficient. An effort is made to trace each infection to its source and eliminate that source. This programme has cut the Army's infection rate to less than thirty per thousand, only one-third that of 1917/18.

Gradually the Army is getting this phase of their problem in hand—which is more than can be said for the broader problem of morale.

Until the Army's practical programme is put into actual operation, morale will still be the answer to: what's wrong with the Army?